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ABSTRACT

Four studies conducted at Harcum College (Pennsylvania) in fall 1969 were presented. From a survey to determine students' reasons for attending Harcum, it was concluded that substantial numbers of students view their college education as a means of acquiring future direct, material rewards. A study on student attrition demonstrated the variety and complexity of factors, both situational and personal, associated with withdrawal from college. The results of a national study of retention and withdrawal patterns, a survey of "dropouts" from five selective women's colleges, and a study of Harcum students not returning for their second year were reviewed. The most frequently stated reason given by Harcum students was "transfer to a 4-year college." Another study to determine the national picture of eligible first-year students not returning for their second year surveyed 100 junior colleges. Results showed an average retention rate of 70%. There was, however, no consistent retention rate among institutions, either in terms of enrollment size, types of student body, or types of institutional control. An instrument that measures study habits, attitudes, and orientation was incorporated in the freshman battery of guidance tests and inventories. In comparison with a normative group of 3,054 freshmen from nine colleges, Harcum students fell at approximately the 50th percentile on each measure. Students scoring at, or below, the 25th percentile were given direction for developing better study habits. (MB)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

[CHARACTERISTICS OF
HARCUM JUNIOR COLLEGE STUDENTS]

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HARCUM JUNIOR COLLEGE
BRYN MAWR, PENNA. 19010

TO: All Faculty and Staff

SUBJECT: Student Questionnaire - Reasons for Attending Harcum

October 1969

1. In October 1969 Harcum students were invited to respond anonymously to a general questionnaire asking them, among other items, to indicate from among 7 "forced-choice" statements and one open-ended write-in option, all of their reasons for coming to Harcum.

2. Some 264 or 43% of the students responded, and their views are summarized in the following tabulation. All figures reported are percentages, rounded off to the nearest whole number and the figures in parentheses reflect the views of some 4332 students at Wisconsin State University expressed in a similar questionnaire survey conducted in 1965

Table I - Reasons for Attending Harcum

	Harcum	Wisconsin
(1) Get and education	99%	(74%)
(2) Prepare for a vocation	80%	(68%)
(3) Establish new friendships	63%	(42%)
(4) Develop my personality	55%	(70%)
(5) Social life	36%	(23%)
(6) Make contacts for later life	23%	(13%)
(7) Extra-curricular activities	21%	(16%)
(8) Other reasons	21%	(5%)

3. At least 50% of those who responded expressed concern for personality development; formation of friendships; vocational preparation and educational development.

4. It is of particular interest to note that a high percentage of Harcum seniors (92%) in May 1969 also considered educational development to be a reason for attending Harcum with 86% also offering occupational preparation as another reason. Since an average of some 69% of each Harcum freshman class (1961 through 1969) have been enrolled in career-oriented curriculums, a high percentage expressing interest in vocational preparation is to be anticipated.

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5. This vocational emphasis is consistently reaffirmed in two surveys conducted at Harcum in 1967 and 1968. In 1968 some 92% of the students considered "vocational training and skills related to career" a 'goal of a Harcum education; in 1967 some 91% considered "to prepare for an occupation" as a motive for attending college.

6. It therefore becomes increasingly evident that very substantial numbers of students are viewing their college education as a means of acquiring some future direct, material reward. The increasing clamor that courses be geared to practical life situations rather than being directed to the cultural, general educational enrichment of the individual, all seem to suggest that the college years are viewed by many students not so much as a means of becoming a more knowledgeable citizen, but rather as a means of acquiring a better position in life: a 'good' job, a high salary, prestige, power or status.

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A STUDY OF STUDENT RETENTION AND WITHDRAWAL

For a college, its "retention rate" (defined as the percentages of entering freshman who graduate on schedule with their respective classes) is more than a simple "statistic". Loss of students is a costly phenomenon to the institution even though some of those "lost" to the college transfer to other institutions and complete degree programs.

Considering the amount of time, energy and money spent in the recruitment-admissions process, the problem of attrition in each class prior to graduation cannot be ignored. And, since a "low" retention rate may have implications for institutional actions - in such areas as curriculum evaluation, admissions and student-faculty relations - this type of "statistic" reflects a state of affairs which is important on academic as well as "economic" grounds.

Iffert's(1) national survey of retention-withdrawal patterns revealed the following as the major pattersn of "reasons":

Among students who withdraw from a 4-year college and transferred, general dissatisfaction ("I was generally dissatisfied") ranked first in importance as a reason for transfer. Second in importance was change in curricular interest, paralleled to lack of interest in studies, and third was desire to be nearer home, paralleled by desire to attend a less expensive institution.

Among women who "discontinued" their schooling, the "reason" (among 20 designated items) checked most frequently was "I planned to be married soon". Taking a full-time job, financial difficulties, and lack of interest in studies, rounded out the leading items for women who did not continue their college work. Slightly more than a fifth (23%) of the women cited "low grades" as compared to 40% of the men.

There is evidently general similarity between the above-cited findings reported in the national survey and the following ones attained in a study conducted by the College Research Center (a cooperative, educational-research agency of the liberal arts colleges for women) among five of its member institutions, Hollins, Mount Holyoke, Sweet Briar, Vassar and Wheaton:

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(1) Robert E. Iffert, Retention and Withdrawal of College Students. Bulletin 1958, No. 1. U. S. Office of Education, (Washington, D.C.).

Table I. Relative Frequency of Mention - "Reasons" Associated with Withdrawal from College.

(1) Marriage	31%
(2) Desired subjects not in curriculum	28%
(3) Academic difficulties	24%
(4) Difficulty in adjusting to college life	21%
(5) Lack of goals or interests	20%
(6) Calibre of institution not as high as expected	18%
(7) Discovery of special talent or interest	16%
(8) Finances	16%
(9) Insufficient h.s. prep	11%
(10) Medical reasons (personal)	11%
(11) College didn't make much sense	10%
(12) Was pushed into college by parents	10%
(13) Decision to stop & work for a while	9%
(14) No real desire to attend college	7%
(15) Medical reasons (family)	4%
(16) Full-time employment	2%

This survey of "dropouts" from five selective women's colleges suggests something of the variety and complexity of factors, both situational and personal, associated with their withdrawal from college. It also helps to focus attention on some of the considerations which usefully might be taken into account in further inquiry into the important problem of student attrition.

Considering the "cost" to a college of student attrition, a careful examination of the scope, nature and general efficacy of counseling and advisory services (academic and personal) in connection with the "withdrawal phenomenon" appears pragmatically worthwhile. (Calculation of the "total cost" of student attrition to a college would constitute a useful first step in an attempt to establish the "pragmatic" value of efforts which might be required to identify and ameliorate any institutional "conditions" conducive to loss of those students whose continuance in the college may be deemed to be mutually beneficial.) The problems faced by students in meeting the academic-social-cultural pressures which are characteristic of college life in a selective, residential context, and the extent to which students succeed in responding to these pressures unquestionably affects their adjustment and may consequently result in their becombing a dropout statistic.

Several action-oriented lines of inquiry into the attrition problem are worthy of careful consideration, including the following which have been suggested by Knoell[2]

(2) Dorothy Knoell, "Institutional Research on Retention and Withdrawal", in Hall Sprague, Editor, Research on College Students (Boulder, Colorado; Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (1960) pp. 44-65.

'Efforts to identify likely dropouts by securing periodic self-reports of intentions and motivations; noting behavior which may be symptomatic of attrition, such as excessive cutting of classes, infractions of rules, and repeated visits to the health service; flagging records of entering students with particular syndromes of characteristics associated with attrition.

Analysis of the process of decision-making about attrition; where it is clearly the choice of the student: are there peak times during the semester (or year) when students think seriously about dropping out? With whom do they talk about it? Who appears to influence their thinking about attrition? When does the final decision tend to be made? What kinds of incidents trigger the final decision? What is the time lag between the preliminary thinking and the decision, and the decision and the action? What point in time seems best for taking preventive action?'

Harcum 1969 Experience

For September 1969 enrollment, 80 juniors or 24% of those invited to return did not do so. Why? The 80 non-returnees were contacted by letter and invited to indicate (open-ended question) the reason(s) for their non-return to Harcum for their second year of schooling. The results of this inquiry are summarized in the following tabulation for the 32 who responded to the follow-up letter. All numbers are rounded off to the nearest whole number. Numbers in parentheses reflect the results of a similar follow-up inquiry among 88 junior invitees who did not return for their senior year in September 1967.

Table I - Reason for Non-Return of Junior Invitees

Reasons	Percent	
(1) No reply to follow-up inquiry	60%	(55%)
(2) Transfer to 4-year college	18%	(19%)
(3) Too expensive	9%	(5%)
(4) Rules and regulations too restrictive	9%	-
(5) Married	6%	(8%)
(6) Faculty poor-work not sufficiently challenging	4%	(25%)
(7) Personal illness	4%	-
(8) Wanted a co-ed school	3%	(5%)
(9) Girls snobbish	3%	-
(10) Wanted more non-class activities	3%	-
(11) Inadequate library	1%	-
(12) Going to work	1%	-
(13) Roommate problem	1%	-
(14) Academic . . attitude of students poor	1%	-
(15) Family illness	1%	(2%)
(16) Did not like location	-	(2%)

From the above tabulation it is clearly evident that the most frequently offered reason for non-return among the respondents was "transfer to a 4-year college". This 'springboard' to further education is a function which Harcum affords to many students who might otherwise never enjoy the opportunity of continuing their collegiate education to the baccalaureate degree level. The evidence of this is reflected in the following unsolicited comments received from both non-returning students and their families.

(1) I must say that Harcum did help me quite a lot, for I doubt if I could have gotten into my transfer school without going to Harcum first. You only get out of a school what you put into it.
(2) Thanks to Harcum, D___ has applied to a very fine four-year college (Ohio State U) and has been accepted.
(3) Mrs. W___ and I are grateful for the progress P___ made last year at Harcum. Because of this record she has been accepted as a transfer student at Ursinus College
(4) I feel that even though her stay was short, her experience at Harcum was a very good one. She enjoyed her classes very much.
(5) L___ year at Harcum was extremely valuable to her and I must thank you again for your interest and understanding.
(6) My association with Harcum has been a pleasant one and I shall always remember the days I spent there.
(7) Thank you for my wonderful year at Harcum.
(8) I was in the Retail Merchandising program at Harcum and I feel that is what has given me the ambition to pursue this field of studies even further. Harcum has done a lot for me.
(9) I really thoroughly enjoyed my first year at Harcum. My year at Harcum will always be remembered and talked about to my friends.
(10) My past year at Harcum was wonderful.
(11) Personally, I loved Harcum. I made many close friends and received an excellent education. I would recommend Harcum to any girl.
(12) S___ had a wonderful year at Harcum. She learned a great deal and enjoyed herself thoroughly. Please extend to the other school officials our thanks for their kindness and interest, especially during S___. illness.

Conclusions

The problem of student attrition has institution-wide ramifications. The complexity of the problem is sufficient to challenge the imagination and resourcefulness of all segments of the college community. The advantages which would be attendant upon improvement in

the "holding power" of the college would seem to be sufficiently great to warrant the attention, interest and effort which will be required to bring it about. Continuing assessment of institutional experience in this area is necessary to systematic evaluation of long-range trends and developments.

This attrition study has suggested at least something of the variety and complexity of factors, both situational and personal, associated with withdrawal from college. It has also sought to focus attention on some of the considerations which usefully might be taken into account in further inquiry into the important problem of student attrition.

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October 1969

HARCUM JUNIOR COLLEGE

BRYN MAWR, PENNA. 19010

October 1969

TO: All Faculty & Staff
SUBJECT: Study Habits and Attitudes of 1969 Freshmen

1. The incorporation of the "Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes" into the September 1969 freshman battery of guidance tests and inventories has provided the College with an instrument for the comparative measurement of student study habits, attitudes and study readiness (or orientation). It is a diagnistic instrument for the academic adjustment counseling of college students.

2. Specifically, it provides the student, faculty and staff personnel information relating to the following:

(1) Delay Avoidance
Student's promptness in completing academic assignments.

(2) Work Methods
Use of effective study procedures.

(3)=(1)+(2) STUDY HABITS (HAB)
A measure of academic behavior, combining Delay Avoidance and Work Methods.

(4) Teacher Approval
Feelings and opinions about teachers, their classroom behavior and methods.

(5) Educational Acceptance
Approval of educational objectives, practices and requirements.

(6)=(4)+(5) STUDY ATTITUDES (ATT)
A measure of scholastic attitudes and beliefs, combining Teacher Approval and Educational Acceptance.

(7)=(3)+(4) STUDY ORIENTATION (ORIENT)
The study readiness of the individual is reflected in this study orientation score which combines Study Habits & Study Attitudes.

3. The average group performance of the 1969 freshmen and 1967 freshmen (figures in parentheses) are summarized in the following tabulation. The normative group with which the Harcum freshmen are compared consists of a sample of 3,054 college freshmen from nine different colleges.

TABLE 1: Harcum Freshmen Study Habits and Attitudes

1.	Average Study Habits Percentile	51st (38th)
2.	Average Study Attitudes Percentile	50th (30th)
3.	Average Study Orientation Percentile	50th (32nd)

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4. This inventory of study habits and methods contains 100 empirically-derived items that have differentiated between high and low scholarship groups. Scores on the SSHA inventory reflect attitudes and study habits that are significantly related to academic success and are relating independent of scores on scholastic aptitude tests. Thus the SSHA can be used to help identify students whose study habits and attitudes may prevent them from taking full advantage of their educational opportunities.

5. High scores on the SSHA are characteristic of students who get good grades; low scores tend to be characteristic of those who get low grades or find college work difficult. Therefore, scores on the SSHA scales can indicate relative strengths and weaknesses in the areas measured by this inventory, and also help to predict future academic achievement. Individual student percentile scores on the SSHA have been furnished by the Director of Guidance to Program Directors who will have them available for review by other faculty members.

6. For the 107 or 27% of the freshmen who scored at or below the 25th percentile in either Study Habits (HAB), Study Attitudes (ATT) or Study Orientation (ORIENT), action has been initiated to direct their attention to techniques of good study habits.

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FIRST-TO-SECOND-YEAR STUDENT ATTRITION

AMONG JUNIOR COLLEGES

1. In September 1969 my office contacted 100 junior colleges throughout the country (two from each state) to ascertain the percentage of invited first year students who returned in September 1969 for their second year. Sixty or 60% responded to the brief questionnaire and 55 or 92% of the respondents requested a copy of this summary report, evidencing a high level of interest in this area of student attrition. The results of this survey are summarized in the following tabulation. All figures are rounded off to the nearest whole number.

Table 1: First-to-second year average rates of return

Student Enrollment	Control and Type of Student Body									Enrollment Averages
	Public Tax-Supported			Private Independent			Private Church-Related			
	Male	Female	Co-ed	Male	Female	Co-ed	Male	Female	Co-ed	
Up to 250	--	--	95%	--	--	81%	--	88%	71%	84%
250 to 500	45%	--	67%	--	79%	70%	--	--	81%	68%
500 to 750	--	--	72%	--	76%	81%	--	80%	82%	78%
750 to 1000	--	--	70%	--	--	84%	--	--	26%	59%
Over 1000	--	--	69%	--	--	70%	--	--	--	70%
Category Averages	45%	--	75%	--	78%	77%	--	84%	60%	72%
Range of Percentages Returning	45%	--	50% to 95%	--	71% to 85%	70% to 90%	--	76% to 100%	12% to 98%	12% to 100%

AVERAGES

Public, Tax-Supported 70% 25 Institutions

Private, Independent 76% 17 Institutions

Private, Church-Related 71% 18 Institutions

AVERAGE ALL RESPONDENTS 72%

Male =45% 1 institution

Female =81% 11 institutions

Co-ed =72% 48 institutions

2. (a) As Table 1 reveals, there is an extremely large range of attrition rates among the colleges surveyed - from 0 to 88%.

(b) For the entire sample of 60 institutions, the average rate of 1969 return was 70%; for Harcum it was 76%.

(c) Evidently there is no consistent average retention rate among these insitutions, either in terms of enrollment size, types of student body or types of institutional control.

(d) The greatest variability exists among private, church-related, co-ed schools, ranging from a 12% to a 98% return rate.

(e) The least variability exists among private, independent, all-female schools.

3. Perhaps the most common problem in educational research is to determine whether two samples differ sufficiently in a selected characteristic to discredit the hypothesis that the samples are from populations similar in the selected characteristic. If the difference between the samples is too great to be reasonably attributed to sampling fluctuations, the conclusion follows that real differences exist in the populations from which the samples were drawn. Such differences which cannot reasonably be ascribed to chance variations (or sampling fluctuations) are said to be <u>significant</u>.

4. To calculate the significance of the difference between two obtained averages, the following formula was applied to the averages listed in Table 1.

$$\sigma_D = \sqrt{\sigma_{M_1}^2 + \sigma_{M_2}^2}$$

D= the difference between the averages of the two groups compared.
σ_D= the standard error of the difference between two uncorrelated means.

5. An obtained difference between two averages is considered to be <u>significant</u> where the odds are great that the true difference between the groups is greater than zero. It is customary to take a $D/\sigma D$ of 3 as indicative of virtual certainty that the true difference between the two groups is greater than zero. (Stated in terms of probability, when $D/\sigma D$ equals 3, there is only one chance in 1000 that the true difference between the two groups is not greater than zero.)

6. The chances in 100 of statistically significant differences between the various retention rates summarized in Table 1 are contained in Table 2.

Table 2: Reliability of the differences between average rates of student retention.

	Public	Private	Church Related	$D/\sigma D$	Chances in 100
A	70%	76%		.95%	83%
B	70%		71%	.08%	53%
C		76%	71%	2.26%	99%
	Female Schools	Co - Ed Schools			
D	81%	72%		1.3%	90%

	Enrollments				
	Up to 250	250 to 500	500 to 750	D/ D́	Chances in 100
E	84%	68%		2.50%	99%
F	84%		78%	2.85%	100%
G		68%	78%	1.50%	93%
	150 to 1000	Over 1000			
H	48%	70%		1.24%	89%
	Up to 250	750 to 1000			
I	84%	48%		2.04%	98%
J	84%		70%	.27%	52$
	250 to 500	750 to 1000	Over 1000		
K	68%	48%		1.06%	85%
L	68%		70%	.31%	62%
	500 to 750	750 to 1000			
M	78%	48%		1.70%	96%
N	78%		70%	3.0%	100%

7. (a) It is therefore clearly evident from the data presented in Table 2, that the chances (probability) of the differences reported being statistically significant is substantial in the following cases, the letter following the number referring to the line in Table 2.

(1-C) Between Private-independent and Private, church-related (99 in 100).

Therefore, on the average, private, independent junior colleges can expect a greater retention than church-related schools.

(2-D) Between all female and co-ed student bodies (90 in 100). All-females have a greater rate of return than co-ed.
(3-E) Between enrollments up to 250 and 250 to 500 (99 in 100) Up to 250 have a significantly higher rate of return.
(4-F) Between enrollments up to 250 and 500 to 750 (100 in 100). Up to 250 have a significantly higher rate of return.
(5-G) Between enrollments 250 to 500 and 500 to 750 (93 to 100). 500 to 750 have a significantly higher rate.
(6-H) Between enrollments 750 to 1000 and over 1000 (89 in 100).
(7-I) Between enrollments up to 250 and 750 to 1000 (98 in100).
(8-M) Between enrollments of 500 to 750 and 750 to 1000 (96 in 100)
(9-N) Between enrollments of 500 to 750 and 1000 and over (100 in 100).

(b) In summary then, statistically significant differences were found to exist favoring:

(1) Private-independent as compared with Private-church related schools.

(2) All-female schools have a greater average rate of return than do co-ed schools.

(3) In terms of enrollment sizes, the smallest schools (up to 250 enrollment) have significant greater returns as compared with all other enrollment sizes.

(4) Also - 500 to 750 size enrollments were statistically, significantly greater than the 750 to 1000 groups and the over 1000 groups.

(5) Therefore, based upon this sample of 60 schools, the data indicates that the highest rates of return occur among the smallest schools (84%) and among those having an all-femals student body (81%).

(c) It is therefore concluded, with a high degree of likelihood, that the differences noted in 7a above are not mere chance variations but do, in fact, represent statistically significant, real differences among the various groups of junior colleges examined in this study.

8. The cooperation of all institutions that furnished data for this cooperative survey is sincerely appreciated. It is only through their assistance that it has been possible to carry out this study.

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October 1969